

NCA
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BRITISH POLITICS

ANNCR:

BRITAIN'S TWO MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES, LABOR AND CONSERVATIVE, HELD THEIR ANNUAL CONFERENCES OVER THE PAST TWO WEEKS IN WHAT IS BELIEVED TO BE THE LAST MEETINGS BEFORE THE NEXT GENERAL ELECTIONS. VOA CORRESPONDENT DAVID WILLIAMS DISCUSSES THE OUTCOME OF THE TWO MEETINGS.

VOICE:

ONE THING THAT CAME OUT OF BOTH PARTY CONFERENCES IS THAT THERE IS SOME DEEP DIVISION ON IMPORTANT ISSUES WITHIN THE RANKS OF BOTH CONSERVATIVE AND LABOR PARTIES, BUT MORE SO WITH LABOR. PRIME MINISTER JAMES CALLAGHAN IS PINNING HIS HOPES OF WINNING THE NEXT GENERAL ELECTION -- THAT MUST BE CALLED WITHIN TWELVE MONTHS -- ON CONTROLLING INFLATION. THAT MEANS KEEPING INFLATION IN SINGLE FIGURES OR AT LESS THAN TEN PERCENT. A FEW YEARS AGO IT RAN AS HIGH AS TWENTY-FIVE PERCENT.

TO DO THIS, THE CALLAGHAN GOVERNMENT HAS PROGRESSIVELY TIGHTENED ITS POLICY ON WAGE INCREASES TO A FIVE PERCENT FIGURE. BUT THE BIG UNIONS HAVE DEMANDED MORE, AND AT THE PARTY CONFERENCE THE UNION BLOC VOTES LED TO A REJECTION OF THE FIVE PERCENT RESTRAINT BY MORE THAN A TWO-TO-ONE MARGIN. MISTER CALLAGHAN IS NOT BOUND BY THE VOTE, BUT ALREADY UNIONS AND MANAGEMENT ARE DISCUSSING WAGE INCREASES IN THE RANGE OF EIGHT TO TWENTY-FIVE PERCENT.

THE CONSERVATIVES LAST WEEK -- IN A BID TO WIN WORKER SUPPORT -- SAID THEY FAVORED COLLECTIVE BARGAINING TO DETERMINE WAGES FREE OF GOVERNMENT INTERFERENCE. IF A COMPANY'S PROFITS AND PRODUCTIVITY ARE HIGH, DECLARED THE CONSERVATIVES, THEN WAGES SHOULD GO UP ACCORDINGLY.

BUT ALL WAS NOT UNANIMOUS IN THE TORY RANKS EITHER, WITH FORMER PRIME MINISTER EDWARD HEATH PUBLICLY SUPPORTING MISTER CALLAGHAN'S WAGE RESTRAINT PROGRAM. HOWEVER, PARTY LEADER MARGARET THATCHER'S VIEW WON THE DAY, AND THE VICTORY CAST DOUBT ON WHETHER MISTER HEATH WOULD HAVE ANY ROLE IN A FUTURE CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT. AS FOR DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TWO PARTIES, LINES WERE PRETTY SHARPLY DRAWN ON MANY ISSUES -- SOME OF THEM WITH INTERNATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE. ON RHODESIA, LABOR OPPOSES THE INTERNAL SETTLEMENT, WHILE A CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT WOULD BACK IT AND OPPOSE THE GUERRILLAS. THE CONSERVATIVES WOULD TIGHTEN COLORED IMMIGRATION, SPEND MORE ON DEFENSE, BE MORE ACTIVE IN THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY, HAVE STRICTER LAW-AND-ORDER POLICIES AND REVERSE THE LABOR GOVERNMENT'S COMPREHENSIVE EDUCATION SYSTEM. TO CONTROL INFLATION, THE CONSERVATIVES SPEAK OF STRICTER CONTROL OF THE MONETARY SUPPLY AS OPPOSED TO THE LABOR GOVERNMENT'S WAGE RESTRAINT POLICY. NEITHER PARTY CHOSE TO DEBATE PRICE CONTROL.

THE NEXT FEW WEEKS AND MONTHS SHOULD SHOW WHETHER LABOR STILL CONTROLS THE BALANCE OR WHETHER IT HAS SHIFTED TO THE CONSERVATIVES. PARLIAMENT REOPENS NEXT WEEK, AND THERE IS SOME TALK OF A NO-CONFIDENCE VOTE AGAINST THE LABOR GOVERNMENT WHICH DOES NOT HOLD AN OVER-ALL MAJORITY. THE GOVERNMENT, THE UNIONS, AND MANAGEMENT ARE NOW GETTING DOWN TO THE NITTY-GRITTY OF BARGAINING, AND ALREADY THE FORD MOTOR COMPANY HAS OFFERED ITS FIFTY-SEVEN THOUSAND STRIKING WORKERS AN EIGHT PERCENT WAGE INCREASE, EXCEEDING THE GOVERNMENT GUIDELINES. THE POWERFUL MINING AND GAS COMPANY UNIONS HAVE DEMANDED SIZEABLE INCREASES, THREATENING TO STRIKE IF THE DEMANDS ARE NOT MET. ON THE OUTCOME

OF THESE NEGOTIATIONS WILL HINGE THE KIND OF WINTER THE BRITISH PEOPLE WILL FACE AND THE SURVIVAL OF THE COUNTRY'S LABOR GOVERNMENT.

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